DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 662 HE 021 532

AUTHOR Nida, Steve A.; Braucht, George S.
TITLE An Undergraduate Major in Employee Assistance.
PUB DATE Aug 87
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at a symposium at a meeting of the American Psychological Association (New York, NY, August 28-September 1, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Departments; *Employee Assistance Programs; Higher Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Majors (Students); *Psychology; School Business Relationship; *Undergraduate Study

ABSTRACT

An undergraduate program of study to prepare professionals in careers in employee assistance is described, along with implications for traditional undergraduate psychology programs that wish to expand career options available to graduates. The program, which has a broad coursework base in psychology, was developed in the College of Arts and Sciences at Franklin University. Students who complete the program earn a bachelor of science degree. In addition to required courses in abnormal psychology, social psychology, applied research methods, and counseling, electives include traditional psychology courses such as personality and industrial psychology. Fundamental to the program is a strong interdisciplinary approach that blends business coursework and training in the social and behavioral sciences. The cornerstone of the curriculum is a four-course counseling sequence designed to promote the development of basic brief counseling and referral skills. Although the program is oriented toward the student who will work directly with troubled employees, graduate work in employee assistance, psychology, counseling, or social work is possible for program graduates to pursue. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED296662

An Undergraduate Major In Employee Assistance

Steve A. Nida and George S. Braucht

Franklin University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

STEVE A. NIDA

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

In R. L. Lowman (Chair), Training psychologists for employee assistance programs. Symposium presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, New York, August 1987.

HE 021 532

An Undergraduate Major in Employee Assistance

The employee assistance program (EAP) has emerged during the past decade as a strategy for helping troubled employees. Although a scarcity of evaluative data has led some to question whether EAPs are really as effective as their proponents claim (Weiss, 1987), the fact remains that they have become popular. Currently some 65 percent of Fortune 500 companies and 57 percent of the Fortune 1000 have EAPs. As EAPs have become more common, the need for competent and well-trained professionals to manage and staff such programs has appeared.

Colleges and universities have begun to respond to this need (Myers & Myers, 1986). During the last few years the employee assistance field has witnessed the creation of the first opportunities for formal training in employee assistance (as offered, that is, by institutions of higher learning). These opportunities range from single courses offered in schools or departments of business, social work, counseling, and psychology, to full-fledged graduate programs, work in continuing education, and even post-doctoral training. Despite this diversity, one fact is clear: higher education's response to the demand for EAP training has been concentrated at the post-baccalaureate level (Myers & Myers, 1986).

The goal of this presentation, then, is twofold. Our principal objective is to describe an undergraduate program designed to start students on the road to careers in employee assistance. At the same time, though, we will argue (at least implicitly) for the legitimacy of training in psychology as a basis for an employee assistance career. The program to be described here has a broad coursework base in psychology and hence implications for traditional undergraduate psychology programs seeking to expand career options available to

their graduates (Nida & Braucht, 1986). However, we believe that our program may have implications for graduate-level employee assistance training as well.

The Institutional Context of the Program's Development

We would like to begin by sharing just a bit of information about the institutional context within which the undergraduate employee assistance major was developed. These details should be helpful in understanding the orientation of our program.

The major was created in the College of Arts and Sciences at Franklin University (in Columbus, Ohio), an urban, commuter institution with an enrollment of about 4500. Franklin has for many years offered degrees in a number of business and engineering technology fields as well as in nursing, and the school has frequently developed academic programs in response to the needs of the local business community. With an open admissions policy and a long history of catering to the so-called "adult learner," Franklin can be characterized as a non-traditional university. Until about four years ago, however, the College of Arts and Sciences performed exclusively a service role (having no major programs of its own), providing general education courses for students in the university's other colleges.

The last few years have seen Franklin's College of Arts and Sciences assume a more central place in the overall curricular picture at the university, and we can point to at least several factors responsible for this transition. There currently exists a widespread renewed interest in general education, and more and more educators are becoming skeptical of the careerism that has become common in undergraduate education. At the same time the world of business is becoming more aware of the legitimacy of training in the liberal arts as preparation for a career in business. Finally - to return to our point of

departure - Franklin's College of Arts and Sciences developed its first two majors, one of which serves as the focus of this paper.

The directive that eventually prompted the creation of the employee assistance major called for the College of Arts and Sciences to explore potential degree programs that would be innovative and consistent with Franklin's emphasis on career preparation. Although this initial directive may have posed somewhat of a dilemma for the liberally trained faculty in our college, we are comfortable with the eventual outcome of our curriculum development. The reason for our satisfaction lies in the broad, interdisciplinary flavor that characterizes the major.

Later in this presentation we will comment further on the interdisciplinary perspective fundamental to our program, but we have developed this point early because we believe that breadth in a student's training, particularly at the undergraduate level, represents the most appropriate background for entry into a field as diverse as employee assistance programming. Consider the range evident in the following sample of career paths that one might currently pursue in the employee assistance field: counseling, administration, research, marketing, training, health promotion, organizational development, and financial management (as with an external EAP contractor). Although a graduate of our program could compete for entry-level positions in any of these areas, specialization at the graduate level promises to become the standard requirement for the employee assistance professional wishing to advance.

The Development of the Program

Our program has a solid empirical basis. Its development began formally with two pieces of research designed to assess the feasibility of an undergraduate employee assistance major. The first was a focus group that

included employee counselors, health and social service agency directors, and vice-presidents for human resources. The second was a survey of 73 major employers within the Columbus metropolitan area. The results of both projects clearly suggested a need (at least locally) for trained EAP professionals. Furthermore, participants in both cases also provided input useful to the development of the curriculum itself, particularly regarding its business component (to be described in a moment).

From a less empirical perspective, it is also important to recognize the existence of an economic and sociocultural context - both nationally and locally - that has created demand for this type of training. Presently the human service and related health care fields are experiencing pressures from an expanding consumer-driven market interested in not only cost-containment and accountability, but also prevention and brief, problem-oriented counseling. Community-based case management or "managed care" services "frequently utilize paraprofessionals or very recent graduates ... in positions for which they have had little prior training ..., and are expected to do the very difficult work of assessment, intervention, and rehabilitation ..." (Imber-Black, 1986). Consistent with this Zeitgeist, Berdie (1972) proposed some 15 years ago that the counselor of the 1980s would need to be an applied behavioral scientist.

Across the country but especially in Ohio (where the Alcoholics Anonymous movement was born and remains strong), there are many such individuals who are in a position to benefit from academic training of this sort. Some of these are interested in assuming roles in substance abuse, employee assistance, or wellness programs; others may be interested in moving further up the professional ladder (i.e., progressing on to appropriate graduate study). The community-based service delivery system depends on both of these types of roles.

It is also important to note another regional factor that suggests the need for the type of training that our program offers. The Ohio Industrial Commission, through the Division of Safety and Hygiene, provides consultation - at no cost - to businesses interested in establishing EAPs. In other words, our state already possesses a system that naturally should foster the development of career opportunities in employee assistance.

The Curriculum

The curriculum that emerged is shown in Figure 1; students who complete the

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Insert Figure 1 about here

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

program earn a bachelor of science degree. With its emphasis in psychology, the curriculum bears a resemblance to a clinical/community-oriented version of the traditional undergraduate psychology major. For example, courses are required in abnormal psychology, social psychology, applied research methods, and counseling; electives include other traditional psychology courses such as personality, developmental, and industrial. There are, however, at least three distinctive features of Franklin's employee assistance major.

Interdisciplinary perspective. As we presented earlier, a strong interdisciplinary perspective is fundamental to the program. The importance of such an approach to employee assistance education has been stressed by other EAP educators (e.g., Wolkind, 1985). Perhaps the most basic general characteristic of Franklin University's program is its blend of business coursework with training in the social and behavioral sciences. An interdisciplinary approach is also evident within the social and behavioral sciences component of the program, in which required and elective coursework in anthropology and sociology

(as well as psychology) reinforces the notion that employee problems should be considered in relation to their broader sociocultural context. Furthermore, the counseling courses (as we discuss later) use systems theory as a heuristic framework for training individuals to appreciate the diversity in others.

Business component. One important outcome of our background research was the finding that the business community places a high value on the employee assistance professional's training in business per se. It seems that familiarity with basic business operations greatly enhances that individual's credibility. Consequently, our program includes a business component consisting of seven required courses that provide students with a broad foundation of business knowledge. As Figure 1 indicates, this portion of the curriculum includes courses in business principles, accounting, management, and labor relations.

Counseling sequence and Community Services Program. Because it is vital that the employee assistance professional understand the centrality of the counseling process within the EAP, the cornerstone of the curriculum is a four-course counseling sequence designed to promote the development of very basic brief counseling and referral skills. As Egan and Cowan (1979) have recommended, these courses (taught from a community psychology perspective) collectively stress the development of a core set of skills for interventions that take place within a variety of helping systems (e.g., mental health and physical health programs, business and industry, schools, and self-help groups). Such an approach acquaints future employee assistance professionals with the many resources available for dealing with a wide range of employee problems. The counseling courses introduce primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions; another thread woven through these courses is the demand that empirical validation guide the helping process.

To foster the development of a well-rounded perspective, the Introduction to Counseling course surveys the major theories of counseling psychology. Additionally, students begin to examine their own attitudes, values, behaviors, and goals in reference to the standards of the helping professions. During the second course in the sequence, Counseling Methods, students learn cognitive-behavioral intervention skills that are evaluated and refined through practice and "live interviews." Personal and professional development are encouraged through the use of self-monitoring and self-evaluation.

Because of its historical as well as its current central importance to the EAP concept, the topic of substance abuse is the focus of another counseling course. Within the framework provided by a biopsychosocial model, the course focuses primarily on those interventions appropriate for the multiplicity of problems associated with alcohol and other drugs. Consistent with current thinking on needed future directions in the treatment of substance abuse (Nathan & Niaura, 1985; Pattison, 1985), this course particularly stresses the notion that the matching of clients and services must be an empirically-guided process.

The fourth and final course in the sequence, Employee Assistance Counseling: Current Issues, typically is taken during the student's final year in the program. Students receive exposure to a variety of roles and functions that the EAP professional may be expected to serve. The first half of the course emphasizes the design, implementation, and evaluation of EAPs. Working in groups of four or five, students develop a complete EAP proposal involving such basic tasks as conducting an organizational survey, developing a strategy for needs assessment, writing policy and procedure statements, planning internal promotion, and designing an evaluation plan. The latter half of the course examines the case management process within the context of an EAP.

Augmenting these courses is a Community Services Program. The program offers students practicum experiences in public and private EAPs, outpatient and residential chemical dependency treatment facilities, community mental health centers, and hospitals. Although the university has standing agreements with a number of providers, students may negotiate practicum positions on their own, subject to departmental approval.

Options for Graduates

Although our program is somewhat oriented toward the student who will ultimately work directly with troubled employees, a range of options in addition to entry-level EAP positions exists for our graduates. Of course, graduate work in employee assistance, psychology, counseling, or social work is a possibility; as we indicated earlier, such will likely become, for all practical purposes, a necessity as the EAP field continues to develop its own identity. Employment in the field of mental health or chemical dependency is also an immediate possibility for our graduates. We should also point out that the business component of our curriculum enables our graduates to compete well for entry-level positions outside of the employee assistance area. (This feature is especially significant since companies creating an EAP frequently do at least some staffing from within the organization.) Finally, although we caution against overspecialization at the undergraduate level, our students can effectively create a concentration in either EAP management or EAP marketing by carefully supplementing the business component of the curriculum. The former, for the student interested in becoming an EAP administrator (without doing counseling), also creates career options in the fields of human resources management and personnel; the latter is for the student interested in marketing and selling EAPs.

Characteristics of Our Students

There are several distinct types of students who have been attracted to the program. Generally, the individual has a strong interest in the behavioral sciences and is equally interested in the marketability of a degree in business. The majority of students are female, employed, and older than the traditional college student.

As anticipated, the program has attracted a number of individuals interested in working with substance abusers. There has also been interest among Franklin's nursing students. In addition, the program has drawn several people already working in the EAP, mental health, or chemical dependency fields who seek the credentials provided by the degree. Finally, we have received inquiries from a few students who already have bachelor's or master's degrees but are interested in the employee assistance degree as well; it is often appropriate, however, to refer these individuals to suitable graduate programs.

The composite profile of the 20 students who have graduated from this program is consistent with expectations. At least six of our students have gone on to or are headed for graduate study; one in a doctoral program in industrial/organizational psychology, one in employee assistance, one in social work, one preparing for the ministry and another studying pastoral counseling, and yet another in law school. Several students have obtained entry-level positions in employee assistance or a related field, while a few others have taken jobs in business but outside of the employee assistance area.

Conclusions

In short, the person who completes Franklin's employee assistance major has been trained as an applied behavioral scientist; we see this individual as the product of what we might call a "scaled-down" version of the scientist-practitioner model. Our graduate is actually a paraprofessional with basic helping skills who has also been exposed to EAP administration, marketing, and promotion. Although, as we have discussed, we see a variety of options available to our graduates, perhaps the most typical position we could envision (for those not going on to graduate work) would involve such preclinical or "upstream" functions as screening, case management, and primary prevention.

It is important to realize that - at least at present - there exists a tremendous diversity in the backgrounds of those working in the employee assistance field. Some have little or no formal training; others have degrees far removed from the field of employee assistance. Unfortunately, the initial point of contact for the employee needing assistance is sometimes a person with minimal training in the behavioral sciences. Our program attempts to produce individuals who can fill that role more effectively.

References

Berdie, R. F. (1972). The 1980 counselor: Applied behavioral scientist. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 50, 451-456.

Egan, G., & Cowan, M. A. (1979). People in systems: A model for development in human-service professions and education. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Imber-Black, E. (1986). The systemic consultant and human-service-provider systems. In L. C. Wynne, S. H. McDaniel, & T. T. Weber (Eds.), Systems consultation. New York: Guilford Press.

Myers, D. W., & Myers, P. S. (1986). Back-to-school: An EAP guide. EAP Digest, 6 (5), 48-53.

Nathan, P. E., & Niaura, R. S. (1985). Behavioral assessment and treatment of alcoholism. In J. H. Mendelson & N. K. Mello (Eds.), The diagnosis and treatment of alcoholism. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Nida, S. A., & Braucht, G. S. (1986). Program aims at EAP careers. APA Monitor, 17, 33.

Pattison, E. M. (1985). New directions in alcoholism treatment goals. In B. S. McCrady, N. E. Noel, & T. D. Nirenberg (Eds.), Future directions in alcohol abuse treatment research. Rockville, MD: NIAAA.

Weiss, R. M. (1987). Writing under the influence: Science versus fiction in the analysys of corporate alcoholism programs. Personnel Psychology, 40, 341-356.

Wolkind, B. L. (1985). D. W. Myers speaks out on EAP education. EAP Digest, 5 (5), 21-24.

Figure 1. Franklin University's Employee Assistance Curriculum

General Education Core
(total of 76 semester hours)

Communications (12)
- COMM 100 Speech Communications (4)
- COMM 120 College Writing (4)
- COMM 320 Report Writing (4)

Mathematics (4)
- MATM 230 Statistics I (4)

Humanities (8)
- Choice of humanities courses

Behavioral Science (16)
- ANTH 110 Anthropology (4)
- PSYC 110 General Psychology (4)
- SOCL 110 Introduction to Sociology (4)

Science (8)
- SCIE 112 Introduction to Human Biology (4)
- Science elective (4)

Business (28)
- ACCT 110 Financial Accounting (4)
- BSAD 110 Business Principles (4)
- INFO 110 Survey of Information Processing (4)
- BSAD 112 Principles of Management (4)
- ECON 201 Economics I (4)
- BSAD 222 Human Resource Management (4)
- BSAD 334 Labor Relations (4)

One of the following:
- POSC 110 Political Science (4)
- HIST 115 American History (4)
- HIST 121 World History (4)

Major Area of Concentration
(total of 40 semester hours)

A 2.0 grade point average is required in the major area. For transfer students, at least 20 hours must be taken at Franklin University.

Required Courses (28 hours)
- PSYC 230 Abnormal Psychology (4)
- PSYC 240 Introduction to Counseling (4)
- PSYC 331 Social Psychology (4)
- PSYC 340 Counseling Methods (4)
- PSYC 341 Substance Abuse Counseling (4)
- PSYC 351 Applied Behavioral Research (4)
- PSYC 440 Employee Assistance Counseling: Current Issues (4)

12 Additional Hours from the Following:
- ANTH 112 Black Culture (4)
- ANTH 220 Urban Anthropology (4)
- ANTH 320 Medical Anthropology (4)
- SOCL 221 Women in the Workforce (4)
- SOCL 230 Marriage and Family (4)
- PSYC 234 Industrial Psychology (4)
- SOCL 330 Social Deviance (4)
- PSYC 332 Personality Theory and Research (4)
- SOCL 332 Social Problems (4)
- PSYC 333 Human Growth and Development (4)
- PSYC 350 Tests and Measurements (4)
- PSYC 450 Practicum (up to 8 hours)
- PSYC 460 Special Topics in Psychology (1-4 hours). Includes: Human Sexuality, Counseling Women, Counseling Minorities, Cross-Cultural Counseling, Family Therapy, Group Therapy, Crisis Intervention, Primary Prevention, Program Evaluation

Free Electives (8)